

TOUGH GRACE IN DIFFICULT PLACES A STUDY OF THE BOOK OF TITUS

STUDY THREE

Looking for a Few Good Men

Titus 1:5–9

Spiritual leaders must be qualified. Their character qualities must blend with Christlike maturity. If not, they have no business leading a church.

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

BRITISH author and pastor Tom Wright recalls a near-disastrous flight in South Africa. He was in a small plane with his wife and two others flying over open bushland when the instruments failed.

We might not have realized how serious the situation was if the pilot had not turned round to talk to us. . . . He handed the map back to us with an air of desperation. “Well,” he said, “you see if you can figure out where we are!”¹

Wright and his party made it safely to their destination by flying low and picking up their location from a road sign! He ends his harrowing tale with a valuable point: “When the pilot can’t figure out what’s going on, the whole plane is in trouble.”²

What happened in that airplane can happen in a church. Without spiritually qualified leaders who know their way, a church can veer into a wilderness of heretical theology and harmful practices—losing sight of Christ’s truth and losing touch with Christ’s way.

False teachers in the churches in Crete were getting the new believers hopelessly lost. So Paul urgently instructed Titus to appoint elders in the churches—qualified pilots who could steer the believers back on course and keep them going in the right direction.



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PREPARE YOUR HEART

Pray for wisdom as you study Paul’s instructions for selecting church leaders and pray for your spiritual leaders to be faithful to their calling.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

Paul asked Titus to “set in order” the churches in Crete (Titus 1:5 NASB). The Greek word for “set in order” is *epidiortho*. It’s from the root word *ortho*—as in *orthopedics*. Just as doctors straighten broken bones, so also Titus was to straighten out the churches that had been fractured by heresy and sin.

To do this delicate task, Titus needed a team of qualified spiritual leaders. “Appoint elders in each town,” Paul wrote (1:5). What does “each town” imply about the growth of Christianity and the number of churches in Crete?

How did these churches form? One possibility is that Jewish Cretans, visiting Jerusalem for the festivals, were among the converts on the day of Pentecost ([Acts 2:9–12, 41](#)). Upon returning home, these eager new believers spread the gospel in various cities and started church communities. It’s likely they had little guidance, however, until Paul and Titus arrived decades later. By then, charlatans and heretics had infiltrated the young churches and “were turning whole families away from the truth by their false teaching” (Titus 1:11).

The situation required qualified spiritual leaders to help Titus set things straight. But whom could Titus trust? To help Titus pick the right men, Paul gave him a job description for leaders.

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Observation: The “Blameless” Qualities Elders Must Possess

In *Titus 1:5–9*, Paul listed 17 qualifications to use in finding leaders. The qualities are essentially the same as the ones Paul gave Timothy, who was stationed in Ephesus. The first attribute serves as an overarching qualification: “An elder must live a blameless life” (1:6)—not a sinless life, for no one would qualify. Rather they are to be “men of unquestioned integrity” (1:6 PHILLIPS). They must have a good reputation in the church and broader community.

The rest of the qualifications spell out the specifics of what a blameless life looks like in a person. An elder must be blameless or “beyond reproach” (1:6, 7 NASB) in three areas: home life, character and conduct, and church responsibilities.

Regarding Marriage and Family—Titus 1:6

People put on masks in public, but at home their unvarnished self is on full display. Write down Paul’s qualifications regarding an elder’s relationship to his wife and children in *Titus 1:6*. Include alternate translations and paraphrases found in other *Bible versions*.

A healthy home is a good predictor of a qualified leader. As Paul reasoned in his letter to Timothy, “If a man cannot manage his own household, how can he take care of God’s church?” (1 Timothy 3:5). In *interpretation*, we’ll look closer at what Paul meant by “husband of one wife” and “having children who believe.”

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Regarding Character and Conduct—Titus 1:7–8

Along with being blameless in his home life, a qualified elder must be blameless in his personal life. In the following charts, list the vices that must be absent and the virtues that must be present. Note the paraphrase of these words in *The Message*. Include a definition of each from an English dictionary or click on the Greek word for a definition from the Greek dictionary at billmounce.com.

An Elder Must Not Be . . . <i>Titus 1:7</i>	
Vice	Definition
_____ <i>authades</i>	
_____ <i>orgilos</i>	
_____ <i>paroinos</i>	
_____ <i>plektes</i>	
_____ <i>aischrokerdes</i>	

The qualified elder is free of scandal. He doesn't have a bad track record. He is respected and in that sense is without accusation. He's above reproach.
—Pastor Chuck Swindoll

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An Elder Must Be . . . <i>Titus 1:8</i>	
Virtue	Definition
_____ <i>philoxenos</i>	
_____ <i>philagathos</i>	
_____ <i>sophron</i>	
_____ <i>dikaios</i>	
_____ <i>hosios</i>	
_____ <i>enkrates</i>	

Who is qualified? Who is adequate? We're not looking for people who are sinless but for those who work hard on these qualities . . . those who revere them and, by the Spirit's power, model them. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

Regarding Church Responsibilities—Titus 1:9

How did Paul describe the final three qualifications of elders in *Titus 1:9*? What must they know well and believe in strongly, and what must they be able to do with that knowledge in the church?

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They cling to the Bible. They hold on to it. It is their source of information. It's their marching orders. The person who is best qualified to lead is not politically correct. He is biblically accurate. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Interpretation: Husband of One Wife, Children Who Believe

Paul's requirement that an elder or overseer must be "the husband of one wife" (Titus 1:6 NASB) poses some interpretive questions. It assumes that Paul has only men in mind and asserts that the man must be "faithful to his wife" (1:6).

But *must* the man be married? What if he was never married or was widowed or divorced? Or what if he remarried?

Pastor Chuck guides us through this interpretive minefield in an excursus, "A Husband of One Wife' and the Issue of Divorce" in his commentary, *Insights on 1 & 2 Timothy, Titus*, on pages 301–302. Read the article in the commentary or [online](#) at insight.org.

What conclusions regarding the meaning of "the husband of one wife" do you make from your study?

Paul added that the elder's "children must be believers who don't have a reputation for being wild or rebellious" (Titus 1:6). Most Bible commentators agree that "children" refers to children at home, not adult children on their own.

"The home is the proving ground for church leadership," writes commentator Thomas Constable.³ It doesn't matter if a man succeeds at work. If he doesn't lead his family well at home, he won't do any better with his church family.

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How strictly, however, should we interpret this qualification? Should every child be a believer? If a teen in the family rebels for a time, then should the leader step aside until the prodigal returns? Read [Constable's Notes](#) on Titus 1:6 at netbible.org for a helpful discussion of these questions and write your conclusions in the space below.



Correlation: Exhorting and Rebuking

If Titus had a team of qualified leaders who had “a strong belief in the trustworthy message” of the gospel (Titus 1:9), then, together, they could accomplish two vital tasks in the church: “to exhort in sound doctrine and to refute those who contradict it” (1:9 NASB).

How did Paul describe this dual purpose of pastors and leaders in the following verses?

Ephesians 5:11–13: _____

2 Timothy 4:1–2: _____

Titus 2:15: _____

Why do you think it is essential for leaders to be above reproach to perform these functions in the church?

One voice grounds the sheep in good, sound teaching, and the other voice confronts those who are predators—thieves and wolves who prey upon a flock. The flock needs not only to be taught, it needs to be protected. A person who is not willing to step up and protect is not qualified to lead.

—Pastor Chuck Swindoll

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Application: Valuable Lessons

How can we spot spiritual leaders who are qualified to pilot the church well? Our passage identifies three places to look.

First, *in the privacy of the home, the spiritual leader earns the right to be respected.*

Second, *in his personal life, the spiritual leader models the reasons to be selected.*

Third, *in the public arena, the spiritual leader helps ensure others are protected.*

These qualifications are not just for leaders. They apply to all followers of Christ who seek to be like Him—for they are the qualities of Christ. In which quality have you grown most in the past year or so?

Which qualities may need attention?

Paul's voice in his letter to Titus is steady but passionate as he speaks on behalf of those most vulnerable in the church. They need encouragement and they need protection. Whom can you encourage today? Whom might you need to defend?

No matter our calling, we all can grow in the qualities Paul listed. We may never sit in the pilot's seat, but people still depend upon us to be faithful in whatever role we fill.

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A FINAL PRAYER

Father, I and those I love live in a dangerous world. Crosswinds can cause us to drift off course without anyone realizing it. Hold us close to Yourself during these decadent, drifting times. Give me discernment to spot charlatans. Wisdom to know what's true. Courage to speak up. Strength to do what's best for those who need me most. In Jesus' name, amen.

ENDNOTES

1. Tom Wright, *Paul for Everyone: The Pastoral Letters 1 and 2 Timothy and Titus*, 2d ed. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004), 144.
2. Wright, *Paul for Everyone*, 144.
3. Thomas L. Constable, "Notes on 1 Timothy," *Constable's Notes*, netbible.org, see notes on 1 Timothy 3:4.

For the 2024 broadcasts, this *Searching the Scriptures* Bible study was developed by Bryce Klabunde, vice president of *Searching the Scriptures* Ministries, based upon the original outlines, charts, and transcripts of Charles R. Swindoll's messages. Copyright © 2006, 2024 by Charles R. Swindoll, Inc. All rights are reserved worldwide. Duplication of copyrighted material for commercial use is strictly prohibited.

